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Gator Times



THE NAVY'S "TOP GATOR"
USS NASSAU (LHA 4)



OPERATION UNIFIED RESPONSE

Gator Times

30 years
LHA 4

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On The Cover:
Sailors and Marines embarked on the USS Nassau (LHA 4) carry a pallet filled with water up a hill to trucks waiting to deliver it to an orphanage in Cabaret, Haiti, Feb. 4. Photo by MC3 Desiree Green

Greetings shipmates and thank you for reading the February edition of the Gator Times Captain's Call. First of all let me say that Haiti went extremely well. The NASSAU/24 MEU team made a positive lasting impact on Haiti and the Haitian people in their time of need.

The transit across the Atlantic went well. Can you imagine crossing it over 500 years ago in a small wooden sailing vessel? Rather than days, it took months.

Remember we are headed into an AOR, 5th Fleet, where combat action is taking place daily. Coalition forces are actively engaged throughout the AOR.

Understand the significance of where we are and the mission sets we will participate in. Continue to make sure you are mentally and physically ready for the job at hand.

Finally, be sure to set aside some time for yourself everyday. Donate an hour to working out, education or just reading a book. You need to make daily time

Captain's Call

Capt. Ronald Reis
Commanding Officer
USS Nassau (LHA 4)



to regenerate because we will be in this high stress AOR for an extended period of time.

Until next time... stay motivated and remember to motivate those around you!

CMC Corner



Nassau Family and Friends,

Our first month of deployment is over and it was a busy one for the crew. Shortly after departing Norfolk, Nassau was diverted from our scheduled deployment to support Operation Unified Response, the mission to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to the people of Haiti.

Operations were non-stop for our first three weeks and several of our departments had accelerated daily routines. Deck and Engineering conducted well deck operations on a daily basis, Air Department conducted flight quarters nearly around the clock and our Medical Department provided aid to numerous patients until the day we departed the area.

Nassau recently earned her third consecutive Battle "E" award. The award is a testament to the hard work and dedication of every Sailor aboard the ship. This accomplishment is no small feat, as the grading criteria in all warfare areas are scrutinized heavily. It's not uncommon for a command to take 10 or 15 years to earn three awards.

Whether aboard the ship or holding down things

on the home front, we have a long road to travel before we return to homeport. I need every Sailor and Marine to stay focused and be safe. Our daily schedule will keep us busy, but I'd like everyone to think about furthering their careers. Now is the time to study for the next advancement exam, and get those workcenter and warfare qualifications done.

For our Families back home, I ask that you take advantage of the events the Nassau Family Readiness Group has planned during our deployment. Also, I ask that everyone remember OPSEC, and be cautious of what you write, or talk about to loved ones on what our ship is doing and where our ship is during deployment. During deployment our communications will be monitored, violation of OPSEC can lead to loss of e-mail privileges as well as it can endanger our mission.

In closing, I ask our Sailors and Marines to keep doing good things for the command and for yourselves. To our family and friends thanks for the warm thoughts and prayers, and most of all your never-ending support.

Until next issue, take care and God Bless.

Nassau ARG/24 MEU Supports Operation Unified Response

From USS Nassau Public Affairs

The more than 4,000 Sailors and Marines of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group (NAS ARG) and 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU) supported Operation Unified Response, the humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR) effort in Haiti, from Jan. 23 to Feb. 7.

The group is composed of the Tarawa-class multipurpose amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19), and the Whidbey Island-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48).

The group left Norfolk, Va., Jan. 18, for a regularly scheduled deployment to the 5th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility, but was ordered the next day to proceed to Haiti after embarking 24 MEU off the North Carolina coast near Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen made the decision to divert NAS ARG/24 MEU from its planned deployment based on the continuing urgent need for assistance in Haiti following a devastating earthquake Jan. 12.

NAS ARG provided an array of helicopters and amphibious landing craft that increased the Navy's ability to quickly bring relief supplies ashore. 24 MEU provided an additional force to provide security ashore. The medical personnel and facilities aboard all three ships joined medical assets already in place.

The group arrived off the coast of Haiti Jan. 23, and immediately began providing humanitarian assistance to the earthquake-stricken nation. Several patients were flown to Nassau and taken down into the ship's medical department for treatment.

"I never dreamed I would do something like this



The amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4) operates off the coast of Baie de Grand Goave, Haiti. Nassau conducted humanitarian and disaster relief operations as part of Operation Unified Response after a 7.0 magnitude earthquake caused severe damage in and around.

Photo by MC1 W. B. Swoboda

when I was trained as a stretcher-bearer," said Boatswain's Mate Seaman Anuradha Sharma, from Queens, N.Y., and stationed aboard Nassau. "I feel terrible for what has happened to Haiti, but I'm grateful I'm able to help in any way I can."

Providing humanitarian assistance/disaster response is nothing new to Nassau's crew. The ship provided aid to Galveston, Texas, after Hurricane Ike devastated that city in 2008.

"We've had a lot of training for humanitarian assistance," said Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class (SW) Steve Banner, from Bristol, Tenn. "I was on board for Galveston, so I've had this experience before. In Haiti the language barrier makes it a little more tasking, but my shipmates have really stepped up and provided translators."

Air Force Gen. Douglas Fraser, commander of U.S. Southern Command, released the NAS ARG/24 MEU from the mission after assessments made from leadership of the multinational interagency effort

indicated that ground-based relief efforts had drastically improved.

"Thanks to the expeditionary capabilities of the Nassau ARG with the embarked 24 MEU, we were able to help the government of Haiti, UN and international relief workers mitigate the immediate impact of the earthquake on communities both near and further away from the epicenter," Fraser said.

"The ongoing contributions of U.S. and international relief organizations with extensive experience and expertise in helping nations recover from disasters has lessened the need for units with capabilities like those of the Nassau ARG and 24 MEU, so I have released them from this mission with our utmost gratitude for their timely support to this important humanitarian mission."

While on the ground in Haiti, NAS ARG/24 MEU was instrumental in assisting the World Food Program in Carrefour and Maison Lecrai, supporting 16



Lt. Cmdr. Steven L. Learo speaks over the megaphone during a food delivery. The country was struck by a 7.0 earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010 leaving many helpless. United States Navy Sailors are supporting Operation Unified Response, the humanitarian aid/disaster relief mission to Haiti. Photo by MC3 Desiree Green

distribution sites around Haiti. They also assisted Joint Task Force - Haiti in constructing a 250-bed interim aftercare medical facility in Port-au-Prince for the U.S. Agency for International Development to provide follow-on care for convalescent patients.

Medical and dental personnel from 24 MEU treated more than 100 Haitians on the island of Gonave, while medical personnel aboard Nassau and Mesa Verde treated 16 Haitian earthquake victims aboard shipboard medical facilities.

"I'm very grateful and blessed that I could help make a really big difference in a time of need," said Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Laketta Thomas of Bainbridge, Ga., aboard Nassau. "It means so much to me to know that I have provided care, support and understanding to those that needed help."

After departing Haitian waters, NAS ARG/24 MEU continued their deployment to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility to conduct theater security cooperation missions and to serve as 5th Fleet's Theater Reserve, relieving the USS Bonhomme Richard ARG and 11 MEU.



A US Navy Sailor helps deliver food in support of Operation Unified Response, the humanitarian aid/disaster relief mission to Haiti. The country was struck with an earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010 that left many helpless. Photo by MC3 Desiree Green



OPERATION: UNIFIED RESPONSE



Nassau Sailor Spends 48 Hours in Haiti

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

The CH-53E Super Stallion I was on touched down at Carrefour's Civil Military Operation Center (CMOC), kicking up a cloud of dust. Layers of dirt covered the scenery like talcum powder and the clouds created a haze in the air. A Marine Corps Staff Sergeant briskly approached the helicopter, shielding his eyes with one arm.

"You should probably hop right back on that helicopter," Staff Sgt. Jeremy Puckett told me. The Paducah, Kan., native smirked and cleaned his glasses as the helicopter took off.

"The Landing Craft Utility you are supposed to be heading back on leaves in thirty minutes and it's an hour and a half drive from here," Puckett said. "Welcome to Carrefour's CMOC. You'll be staying awhile."

The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU) had set up camp on a large slab of concrete known as "The Block." The smell of cigarettes, burning trash, and sweat saturated the area. Groups of locals gathered around the walls, cheering for the Marines and trying to touch them as they walked by.

A line of Haitians and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) waited outside of the largest tent where the Maritime Civil Affairs Team 2 (MCAT 2) ran administrative functions. NGOs are volunteer organizations, such as doctors, missionaries and church groups, who work in conjunction with the military to support humanitarian efforts. Government officials and local community leaders waited for their turn to request aid from the MCAT.

"Some of the NGOs will come for a few weeks and leave, creating a gap of dependency that is hard to fill," said Electronics Technician 1st Class (EXW/SW) Joel Eyzaguirre, a native of Queens, N.Y. "Our



A small Haitian boy and a Haitian man find supplies to begin rebuilding the decimated homes of Haiti. The people of Haiti are recovering from a devastating earthquake and the aftershocks that followed, living in 'tent cities' and houses reduced to pebbles and metal bars.

Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

mission is to stay and bolster the local government and community leaders so that they can depend on themselves when we leave the area. The Haitian people need to be able to trust their permanent fixtures in the community."

Another function of the CMOC is presence. Patrols of Marines take to the streets so the Haitians can feel at ease and also map unvisited portions of Carrefour to find those in need. They mark locations with GPS and visit known community leaders and NGOs to ensure the aid given to them is distributed fairly.

Marine Cpl. Tristan Wilkerson, a New Orleans native and patrol leader, passed out the muster sheet for the 2:30 p.m. patrol.

Boots kicked up more dust as the patrol moved out to meet their interpreter, Peterson Lezin, a Haitian native fluent in both English and Creole. An interpreter's primary task is to make sure the crowds



Small Haitian children walk without shoes among debris from buildings damaged in the earthquake. The people of Haiti are recovering from a devastating earthquake and its aftershocks. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

remain at a reasonable level and that no one gets out of hand.

"Everyone here is scared," said Lezin. "The earthquake decimated prisons as well as other buildings, releasing the convicts out into the street."

I saw small children without shoes walk across the debris-littered landscape. They gathered in tent cities with their elders to shade them from the sun. But these people are very resilient. They laughed and danced behind the patrols, offering us everything from sugar cane and mangos to Cuban cigars and homemade socks.

"The kids here are so friendly," said Lance Cpl. Aaron Adkins. "They just want to hug us and give us stuff. Many of them are very intelligent and can speak up to four languages. I have a son and my wife is pregnant and it hurts when the kids come up and hold your hand and walk side-by-side down the street with you. You want to give them food and water, but we're not authorized to do that on patrol."

Then the crowd parted as Printemps Salvadine, a Haitian woman and local community leader walked up to us and begged Lezin for something. We followed her up a steep mountain road.

"We need tents to keep out the rain," said Salvadine. "The strong men take all of the supplies and try to sell them to us. We cannot afford the tents or the food tickets." Her voice rose to a frantic pitch as Wilkerson attempted to calm her down. She continued to plead with the Marines, telling them how she has to buy water and how afraid she is that everyone is receiving help except them.

"Ma'am, I need you to listen to me," said Wilkerson as

Lezin translated for him. "We are doing everything we can. I will mark your location on the GPS. You need to report to the CMOC so you can receive your meal ticket and other needed supplies."

Salvadine took Lezin's hand and led him a short distance down the road into a tent made from sticks and sheets, gesturing for them to look inside. The smell of musty clothes and mold filled the air. Lezin went to a bed where two Haitian children were sleeping and touched the sheets.

"Wet sheets," said Lezin. "Their clothes are probably damp, too. They'll get sick."

Madame Cluvil, the owner of the tent, repeatedly put her fingers to her lips and kissed them, throwing it upwards toward the sky with an open palm.

"That means, 'Oh God hear my prayers,'" said Lezin. After marking their position on the GPS, the patrol returned from their five-hour excursion into the streets of Carrefour.

"The people of Haiti have everything they need. There's plenty of food and fresh water," said Lezin. "They just need to come together and form a plan instead of relying on charity that isn't going to last forever."

Haitian Mother and Child Reunited Aboard USS Nassau



Mariene Gaby, a survivor of the Haitian earthquake, is reunited with her newborn child aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4). The newborn was taken to the Nassau where its medical personnel cared for the child until the mother was found.
Photo by MC3 Desiree Green

By MC3 Desiree Green
USS Nassau Public Affairs

The elevator slowly made its way down to USS Nassau's (LHA-4) medical unit. Cameras rolled as it halted in to place and seven people waited in joyful yet nervous silence for the doors to slide open revealing a room filled with medical staff, some smiling, some crying. This moment, drawing the end to what seemed to be a miracle.

On Jan. 18, Nassau got underway from its homeport of Norfolk, Va., for a regularly scheduled seven month deployment. A few days later it was detoured in order to support Operation Unified Response, a humanitarian aid and relief mission to Haiti. The country had been devastated by a 7.0 earthquake

on Jan. 12 that left many of its buildings in ruins, its people helpless and the death toll rising.

The Navy responded, sending several Navy vessels including embarked Marine units into the Caribbean Sea to aid and assist.

Medical personnel aboard Nassau were prepared to take whatever came their way, expecting to see the worst. However, on Jan. 23, one patient still came as a complete surprise and in a very unexpected manner.

"We got the call that day. We were told there would be two adults and two children, so I was looking for four stretchers," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 1st Class (SW/AW) Jorge Ramirez, a flight deck petty officer who was working in flight

deck triage. "Only three stretchers came in, and on the third stretcher there was a little boy and a box. I just thought that the box had some personal items in it until I noticed that someone had written on its side, 'BABY IN BOX - DO NOT THROW AWAY.'"

To everyone's surprise, inside the box there was indeed a baby - a newborn baby girl with a note indicating that she was two days old.

Nassau's medical personnel immediately treated the child for minor medical problems to establish the status of her health.

With a clean bill of health, news of the child rolled through the ship and soon many were calling the child "baby Nassau." The crew really took to her and everyone wanted to see her. One Sailor knitted a hat and booties set, while another got her a baby-sized navy PT shirt. The outpouring of love just continued to grow.

"I've come to see her every night she's been here," said Marine 1st Lt. Roy Fondren. "I just pray with her, play with her, and sing to her," he said.

Caring for the child for several days, medical personnel were unaware of where the baby's parents were until a Haitian woman came onboard USNS Comfort (T-AH-20) looking for a newborn baby girl fitting the description of the one being cared for aboard Nassau.

The crew was elated. Yet, there were still many concerns that had to be considered before a reunion could be scheduled.

"My main concern was whether or not this was the baby's mother, but to have a mom come from the same place who delivered on the same day with a diagnosis that matches the baby aboard means it's pretty likely that we found the mother," said Lt. Cmdr. Brian Norwood, senior medical officer aboard USS Nassau.

Once it had been verified that the woman was indeed the mother of the child a reunion was arranged.

"I know she has to leave, but I'm going to be sad to see her go," said Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class La-



Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Stanley Kopiczak, Command Master Chief of USS Nassau (LHA 4) feeds a newborn girl in Nassau's medical department while Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class (SW) Laketta Thomas watches. The infant was bought aboard Nassau for medical treatment Jan. 23.
Photo by MC2 Patrick Gordon

ketta Thomas, one of the corpsman responsible for taking care of the infant while she was in Nassau's care. "She's been just wonderful."

The mother timidly walked through the crowd with tears rolling down her cheeks until she reached the center where Thomas stood holding the baby, her little body wrapped tightly in a blanket. The staff gently placed the child into her mother's arms and lowered her into a wheelchair. The woman looked into her child's eyes and began to weep as the crew did the same.

Nassau is deployed as part of the NAS ARG/24 MEU as part of Operation Unified Response, the humanitarian aid/disaster relief mission in Haiti. The NAS ARG/24 MEU is comprised of embarked Marines from 24 MEU, USS Nassau, the amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48), and the amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19).

COMMAND ACHIEVEMENTS



ESWS Qualified :

AO2 Alfredo Solis

CS2 Micah Lee

ISSN Steven Spires

YN2 Crystal Bowyer

DC3 Forrest Klitz

EM3 George Sahyoun

MMFN Troy Scott



EAWS Qualified :

CTT2 Jessica Helms

QM2 Shunika Walker

OS3 Joshua Cotto

ABF3 Ryan Moore

YN3 Brandon Favors

CSN Colby Malveaux

EN1 Aaron Villa

QM1 Aundra Lewis

EN2 Timothy Clouser

AO3 Marcus Cook

CS3 Carlton Henderson

ABHAN Darius Sampson

A Word From the Ombudsman

Greetings from your Nassau Ombudsmen,
We'd like to thank those who've requested your family be added to our email list. Our job is much easier when we're able to get information to your families in a timely manner. We're available to help parents, siblings, children and grandparents, as well as spouses, girlfriends and boyfriends. If you haven't already done so, email us at nassauombudsman@yahoo.com and request that your family be added to the list.

We'd like to remind families with babies on the way during this deployment to stay in touch. It's of the utmost importance that the Red Cross sends a message so that the ship has official notification of the birth. We also need to be made aware of the births to let the ship know because sometimes it takes the Red Cross message longer to get there than we'd like.

Militaryonesource.com is not just for family mem-

bers, it's for sailors too. It's filled with information about all areas of Navy life. If your family needs information about the military or the local area, click on the Family Members link. Military One Source has counselors available 24/7 for when you or your family need help coping with Navy life. Just call 1-800-342-9647.

Online resources include the Military One Source and the Fleet and Family Support Center Facebook pages at <http://www.facebook.com/navyffsc> and <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Military-OneSource/7700123369> respectively.

Thank you for your continued support and service to our country.

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Trish 757-353-5178

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USS Nassau Care-line 757-444-9964